

## Lesson Plan - "Do Not Run Aimlessly"

Key Passage: Psalms 119:105-113; Matthew 7:7-11

Central Truth: We keep ourselves from running aimlessly by using the Bible as our guide map under the coaching and leading of the Holy Spirit, as an essential part of our ongoing conversation with God through prayer.

### **Relate**

#### Option #1: Aimless

Wad up some paper to make several paper balls. Set a bucket or trashcan in the middle of the room. Blindfold one student at a time, move the bucket without telling them where in the room it is, and have them try to throw the paper ball into the bucket. For the second round, leave them blindfolded but coach them as to where you've moved the bucket. For the third round, have them throw the paper without the blindfold. Allow as many students to play as would like.

Say: It's very difficult to hit a mark when you can't take aim. In this lesson we're going to talk about not walking through life aimlessly and how God has given us the tools we need to do so.

#### Option #2: iPod Name That Tune

Using your iPod or phone, play songs (only appropriate songs please) that you think the students in your group may know. See who can name the tune first. Play several rounds and keep score.

Say: It's amazing how many songs we know. Often we think memorizing things (like the Bible) is very hard, but when we think about how many songs we might have on our iPod that know every word to, that excuse goes away.

#### Option #3: Group Discussion About Bible Reading and Prayer?

Ask the following questions and allow time for your group to discuss.

How often do you think the typical student in your youth group spends time reading their Bible and praying?

Why do you think so few Christians devote ample daily time to reading their Bible and prayer?

What are the effects on our lives and our churches when the typical Christian spends little if any time in Scripture reading and prayer each week?

## Realize

Bible Teaching Plan:

### Introduction to the Passage

Teach: As we run through the race of life, the prize that we pursue is God Himself. We obtain Him freely as a gift, and it is our focus on God as our prize that causes Christians to live lives of distinction. We keep this undergirding truth in mind as we read the words of the apostle Paul.

READ 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

After establishing the eternal value of the prize that we obtain according to verses 24 and 25, Paul then steers the discussion to the way that the prize shapes the life of the believer. Verse 26 begins with the thought, “So I do not run aimlessly.” We do not want to be the freshman on the cross-country team who gets lost in the woods trying to find his way to the finish line! So that he does not run aimlessly, he needs to study the route, curves, and distance of the course that is before him. The best way that he has to learn about where he is running is to spend time learning from his coach, who knows what lies in front of the runner.

In our spiritual lives, we “do not run aimlessly” by following that exact same strategy. Instead of communicating with a coach, we get to have a conversation with God. Since God is spirit (John 4:24) and Christ has gone away to His Father (John 16:7), talking to God looks different than talking to a human coach. At this point, we arrive at the spiritual disciplines of Bible study and prayer – the two major components of a conversation with God.

### Why Should I Read, Study, Memorize, and Meditate on the Bible?

Teach: Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the entire Bible, spanning 176 verses. The entire chapter is devoted to hammering home the importance of God’s written word. For our purposes in examining how it looks to “not run aimlessly,” we are going to focus on two important truths from the segment of Psalm 119:105-113. The passage says, “105Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. 106I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to keep your righteous rules. 107I am severely afflicted; give me life, O Lord, according to your word! 108Accept my freewill offerings of praise, O Lord, and teach me your rules. 109I hold my life in my hand continually, but I do not forget your law. 110The wicked have laid a snare for me, but I do not stray from your precepts. 111Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart. 112I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever, to the end.”

#### A. The Bible Lights My Path

Teach: Psalm 119:105 opens with the truth, “Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.” In modern terms, God’s Word is the flashlight carried in my hand during a campout, the headlights on the front of my car, or the candle shining in my living room during a power outage. Since we are running after a prize, we need to see where we are going. If we want to avoid running aimlessly, God’s Word shows us the path that He wants us to take. It really is that simple. Unless we spend time reading, studying, and meditating on God’s Word, we are doomed to run aimlessly like someone stumbling around in the dark.

Having the light on my path is so important that there are multiple spiritual disciplines associated with the Bible.

We read it – meaning that we look at its overall unfolding story and teachings by reading verse-by-verse and chapter-by-chapter.

We study it – meaning that we break the text down using cross-references, consulting scholarly writers, and looking at the original language and context.

We meditate on it – meaning that we deeply and slowly contemplate a specific verse or truth. We also memorize it – meaning we commit a verse or passage to memory and hide it in our heart.

Realize Discussion Question #1: What is the difference between reading and studying the Bible?

Realize Discussion Question #2: What is the difference between meditating and memorizing the Bible?

READ 2 Timothy 3:16

Realize Discussion Question #3: How do each of these 4 disciplines keep Christians from “running aimlessly”?

## B. The Bible Is Worth Pursuing

Teach: As the writer is turning to God’s Word, three things strike us about his situation. First, there are forces at work that make his life difficult. He is “severely afflicted” (v107), “[his] life is

in [his] hand continually” (v109), and “the wicked have laid a snare for [him]” (v110). At the same time, the writer repeatedly and consciously commits himself to pursuing God’s Word. He has “sworn an oath and confirmed it” (v106), made a “freewill offering of praise,” and “[inclined] [his] heart” (v112). Finally, God’s Word is the light and lamp that will sustain his pursuit “forever” (v111 and v112).

The forever value of seeking God’s Word as a light for our path is an understanding that we need to have as we seek to integrate the disciplines of reading, studying, memorizing and meditating on God’s Word into our race of life. So many of us have had a time in our lives when we tried to get into the habit of reading the Bible every day – only to be derailed a few days or weeks later by hardships and distractions that pull our time and attention away from God’s Word. Psalm 119:105-112 calls us to set our minds to pursuing God’s Word when it is not easy because of its eternal and illuminating value!

It only makes sense that a primary way that God would communicate with us is by having the Spirit lead us to particular passages of the Bible that He Himself inspired.

Quote: “The purpose of God’s Word is to bring us to God through the salvation that is in Christ. It does this by revealing His plan and purpose, by conforming us more and more to the image of Christ, and by providing the shape of the presence of God with His people through the Spirit of Christ” -Graeme Goldsworthy

Realize Discussion Question #4: Since the Bible is God’s primary way of revealing Himself, His plan, and His purpose to His people, how will you dedicate yourself to knowing and applying God’s Word?

Why Should I Spend Time Praying?

Teach: As we think about what God has told us through His Word, we naturally begin to speak back to Him through prayer. The disciplines associated with the Scriptures and the discipline of prayer are all just part of a back and forth conversation with the living God who walks with us along the path of our life. We know how and where to proceed because He leads us through this ongoing conversation.

A. God Wants Me to Come to Him

Teach: If we are in a race in pursuit of enjoying God’s presence as our imperishable prize, it just makes sense that He wants us to seek Him and to spend time with Him. Matthew 7:7-8 says,

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.” God knows everything and holds the whole world in His control. At the same time, He wants us to come talk to Him. He wants to hear from us as we ask, seek, and knock.

Quote: “But God not only has spoken clearly and powerfully to us through Christ and the Scriptures, He also has a Very Large Ear continuously open to us. He will hear every prayer of His children, even when our prayers are weaker than a snowflake. That’s why, of all the Spiritual Disciplines, prayer is second only to the intake of God’s Word in importance.” - Donald Whitney

Teach: Even Jesus Himself took time out of His life and ministry to pray! In one of many references in the four gospels to similar actions, Mark 1:35 says, “And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.” Jesus is God! If He devoted Himself to the discipline of prayer, it gives us two reminders. First, coming to God in prayer really is important. Second, the fact that Jesus prayed to His heavenly Father – and that they are two persons of the Trinity – shows us that prayer is talking to God as part of a dynamic personal relationship.

READ Hebrews 4:15-16

Realize Discussion Question #5: What does Hebrews 4:15-16 say about why and how Christians should pray?

## B. God Wants To Answer My Prayer

Teach: In response to the asking, seeking, and knocking of Matthew 7:7-8, the verses promise in turn that “it will be given to you,” “you will find,” and “it will be opened to you.” This person also “receives” and “finds.”

READ Matthew 7:9-11

Teach: No loving dad will respond to his hungry son’s request for food by giving him a rock or a snake! Instead, these verses remind us of the obvious truth that the father will give him bread and fish (or in the case of modern America, chicken nuggets and French fries!). Verse 11 concludes the section by reminding us, “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” It is the same truth of James 1:17 that “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from

above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”

God wants to respond to us because He loves us like a devoted dad. Even more than the benefits of having our prayers answered, praying is spending time with God Himself – who is the prize we are pursuing anyway! When we are spending time talking to God, we are getting a glimpse of the prize that we will obtain forever when we fellowship with God face-to-face for all of eternity.

Realize Discussion Question #6: How does knowing that God loves you and wants the best for you impact the way you pray?

### **Renovate**

Option #1: Scripture Meditation Exercise

As discussed earlier in the lesson, Scripture meditation is when we deeply and slowly contemplate a specific verse or truth. Have your students spend several minutes meditating on the following verses. Encourage them to read the verses several times and to write notes in their student books as thoughts about the truths conveyed in these verses come to their minds.

Psalms 1:1-6

Matthew 5:3-10

Romans 12:1-2

1 John 2:1-6

Ask: How is this different than quickly reading a passage during a typical quiet time?

Option #2: Prayer Exercise

There are four primary components to the prayers we voice to God: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. Use the following guide to walk your group through public and private times of prayer.

Say & Ask: Adoration is when we ascribe praise and glory to God. What are some things that we can say to God to praise Him and bring Him glory?

Pray as a group for these things.

Say: Confession is when we tell God our sins and ask His forgiveness.

Have students use the space provided to write sins in confession to God. Then, have them pray privately in confession of their sins.

Say & Ask: Thanksgiving is when we tell God we are thankful for the things He has provided for us. These are not only material blessings, but spiritual blessings as well. What are some things that we can thank God for today?

Pray as a group for these things.

Say: Supplication is when we ask God to provide for our needs, the needs of others, and to intervene in our the world.

Have students use the space provided to write needs they know of that they'd like to pray to God. Then, have them pray privately for these needs.

Close your group time with group prayer. It may be that you need to lead this time or you may be able to have multiple students lead in prayer.